

physical mail to those addressees who have not responded within a predetermined time to the mail contents that were dispatched to them by electronic mail.--

REMARKS

The specification changes reflected in the enclosed substitute specification (Attachment A) include the addition of the preferred subheadings at appropriate places within the specification, and they also include minor corrections. None of the changes made in the substitute specification introduces new matter because each change is based upon the international application in the form in which it was published. Attachment B shows the changes that were made in the substitute specification to the specification that was published by the International Bureau.

The claims as above amended present the claimed subject matter in the U.S. claim form to more particularly point out and more distinctly claim the subject matter that the applicant regards as his invention. The new claim further recites the subject matter that the applicant believes to be her invention.

Attached hereto as Attachment C is a set of the claims as they were allowed in the international application, showing all additions, deletions, and modifications of those claims that are reflected in the clean claims presented above.

Also attached hereto is an Abstract of the Disclosure presented on a separate sheet in conformity with the rules of practice.

Based upon the specification and claim amendments to this national phase application, it is believed that the specification conforms with U.S. formal requirements. Additionally, the amended claims as hereinabove presented conform in substance with the corresponding claims that were examined in the international application. And based upon the

acceptance by the International Preliminary Examining Authority of the invention as it was claimed in the amended claims as they were presented in the international application as meeting each of the novelty, the inventive step, and the industrial applicability criteria set forth in the Patent Cooperation Treaty, the claims in the present application are believed to conform with both U.S. formal and substantive requirements, and they are therefore believed to be in allowable form. Accordingly, an early Notice of Allowance is in order and is respectfully solicited.

Should the examiner have any question after considering this Preliminary Amendment, he is cordially invited to telephone the undersigned attorney so that any such question can be quickly resolved, and in order that the present application can proceed toward allowance.

Respectfully submitted,



Alfred J. Mangels
Reg. No. 22,605
4729 Cornell Road
Cincinnati, Ohio 45241
Telephone: (513) 469-0470

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ATTACHMENT B

SUBSTITUTE SPECIFICATION

(Showing All Changes From Published International Application No.
PCT/SE00/00853)

METHOD FOR DISTRIBUTING MAIL

Background of the Invention

Field of the Invention

[0001] The present invention relates to a method of sending mail, and more particularly to a method of sending mail electronically.

Description of the Related Art

[0002] It has become more usual to send mail to an addressee electronically. It would be particularly beneficial if bills and other printed matter were to be mailed by electronic mail. In this regard, a sender could deliver information concerning addresses and mail contents on data media to Posten Sverige AB (Swedish Post Office Department) , which could then send the mail to respective addressees on the basis of its knowledge of their e-mail addresses.

[0003] One problem in this regard is whether or not the e-mail addresses of the addressees are known and whether or not the addressees wish to receive electronic mail.

[0004] Another important problem that arises when wishing to send bills or invoices, for instance to private individuals, via e-mail is that there is no way to check whether the addressee reads his/her e-mail regularly, makes payments by means of his/her personal computer, prints out bills or invoices when necessary, etc., as

distinct from a physical letter sent by standard mail. It is assumed that a letter will be delivered to the addressee and that the addressee will open and read his/her mail.

[0005] These problems are solved by means of the present invention, which relates to a method of greatly facilitating the use of e-mail for sending mail of the kind which the addressee can be expected to answer.

Summary of the Invention

[0006] The present invention thus relates to a method of sending mail by electronic mail [where a] . A sender delivers information relating to the volume of mail to be sent, such as the addressees and contents of the mail, on data media to a receiver which [shall] is to send the mail to the addressees [, and is characterised by feeding the] . The contents of said data media are fed into a computer system in which the addressees are compared with a register that includes information that discloses whether or not respective addressees have an electronic mail address [; causing the] . The computer system [to send] sends respective dispatches by electronic mail to addressees that have an electronic mail address [; causing the computer system to sort] , and it sorts out remaining addressees to [which] whom mail [shall] is to be sent as physical mail [; and subsequent] . Subsequent to the passage of a predetermined period of time from the time at which electronic mail was sent but has still not been answered, [causing] the computer system [to sort] sorts out such addressees and [to send thereto] sends them a corresponding dispatch by physical mail.

Brief Description of the Drawing

[0007] The invention will now be described in more detail partly with reference to an exemplifying embodiment of the invention shown on the accompanying drawing, in which

[0008] -Figure 1 is a simple block diagram which [is intended to illustrate] illustrates a mailing method in accordance with the present invention.

Description of the Preferred Embodiments

[0009] The present invention relates to a method of sending dispatches by electronic mail. By electronic mail is meant [so called] so-called e-mail that is sent over the Internet or over some corresponding network. Different appropriate [authorisation] authorization codes may be included.

[0010] A sender 1 delivers information concerning the volume of mail to be sent, such as addressees and content, on data media to a receiver 2 that functions to send the mail to the addressees 3.

[0011] The sender may be a company [who] that wishes to send bills or invoices to its customers, who then become the addressees. Naturally, the volume of mail may, instead, comprise different tenders, order confirmations, different types of document, such as partially completed declaration forms, etc. However, the invention is primarily useful to companies that wish to send an item of mail to a large number of addressees.

[0012] The invention is exemplified below with reference to a gasoline company [who] that wishes to bill companies and private individuals for the purchase

of gasoline at filling stations by means of a credit card. It will be understood, however, that the invention is not limited to this area of use.

[0013] The gasoline company makes out at regular time intervals a number of bills that are to be sent to credit card owners for payment.

[0014] The sender 1, i.e., the gasoline company, sends information concerning the volume of mail, i.e., the bills [,] to be sent, such as addressees and the contents of respective bills, on data media to the receiver 2 that [shall] is to send the mail to the addressees 3. The receiver may suitably be Posten Sverige AB.

[0015] According to the invention, the contents of said data media are entered into a computer system 4 belonging to the receiver. The addressees are compared with a register in the database 5 of the computer system that contains information as to whether respective addressees have an e-mail address [or not]. The database may also include information as to whether or not an addressee wishes to receive certain mail as e-mail and certain other mail as physical mail.

[0016] The computer system 4 is then caused to send the mail [concerned] concerned by e-mail to those addressees that have an e-mail address. For instance, the e-mail is sent to the personal computer 8 of the addressee 3 via the Internet. The computer system 4 is also caused to sort out remaining addressees to [which] whom the mail [shall] is to be sent as physical mail 6, this mail then [passing] passes through standard mail routines.

[0017] When physical mail is to be sent, the computer system 4 is caused to print out the dispatches by means of a printer 7.

[0018] According to the invention, when a predetermined period of time has passed from the time at which unanswered e-mail was first sent, the computer system 4 is caused to sort out such addressees and to send the corresponding [e-mail] e-mailed information as physical mail.

[0019] The physical mail is suitably sent as a mail item whose content corresponds to the content of the mail item sent by electronic mail. Instead, a bill or invoice reminder can be sent by physical mail.

[0020] By the word answered is meant that the addressee has been in contact with the sender within a predetermined time with regard to the mail item concerned. In the case of a bill, this contact will normally mean that payment is made. The sender informs the receiver that contact has been made or has not been made, after said predetermined time period has expired.

[0021] This is effected by causing the computer system 4 to receive from the sender information concerning those addressees [that] who have answered their mail.

[0022] A large majority of the credit card owners is reached by first sending the mail item by electronic mail. Some of these credit card owners pay their respective bills within the allotted time period, whereas others do not. Those credit card owners who have not said that they are willing to receive electronic mail, are sent their bills or invoices conventionally by physical mail. Some of this latter group will also pay in time, whereas others do not.

[0023] The predetermined time period that shall have passed from when unanswered electronic mail was sent may, of course, vary depending on the type of

mail concerned. In the case of bills or invoices issued by a gasoline company, an appropriate time may be when the standard payment term expires. In this case, the addressees are sent by physical [post] mail a reminder that includes a copy of the bill. Similarly, the same kind of reminder can be sent to those who have already received the first mail item by physical [post] mail.

[0024] Consequently, many mail items, namely the electronic mail items, are less expensive and simpler to send, and a reminder referring to unanswered or unpaid items will be sent automatically together with reminders to those who have not received electronic mail.

[0025] According to one highly preferred embodiment of the invention, the computer system 4 includes a database 5 which includes physical addresses and e-mail addresses of addressees who have expressed a wish to receive electronic [post] mail.

[0026] Consequently, the anticipated response frequency to electronic mail will be much higher than when electronic mail addresses have been obtained from different sources.

[0027] The problems mentioned in the introduction are solved by the present invention.

[0028] Although the invention has been described above with reference to exemplifying embodiments thereof, it will be understood that the person skilled in this art will be able to modify the invention to accommodate different types of mail items. For instance, physical [post] mail can be sent to an addressee who wishes to receive e-mail, after said addressee has been sent a reminder by e-mail.

[0029] The invention is therefore not limited to the aforescribed embodiments thereof, since variations can be made within the scope of the accompanying [Claims] claims.

[CLAIMS]

What is claimed is: